



1856: Lavigerie is appointed director of the Œuvre des Écoles d'Orient.

1875: Lavigerie sent his very first caravan of missionaries. Destination: Timbuktu through the Sahara desert.

Letter to the Office of the Propagation of the Faith (December 1884)

Gentlemen,

Our missions in Kabylia and in the Sahara are constantly developing, as you will see in this report which I have the honour to send you. Previous reports made you aware of the progress of these missions and their way of operating. Today I shall tell you only of what has been achieved during this current year in our mission stations of Kabylia and the Sahara. I hope you will continue to show an interest in these missions, an interest that is more necessary than ever.

There are 10 of these stations, comprising a total of 32 missionaries, among whom are two native clerics (the figure in the chart also includes the personnel in the seminaries and at the Mother-House). Several of the stations have native catechists. These missions have, in addition, five houses of Missionary Sisters comprising 25 religious whose work is to teach the young native girls, organising needlework classes, caring for the sick, visiting almost every day the villages of the neighbouring tribes, etc. To proceed in an orderly manner, I shall speak of: the baptism of natives, schools, orphans, Christian villages, the care of the sick.

1) Baptism of natives – In this article, I shall not repeat to you what you already know, that, in keeping with the wise rules of prudence which were drawn up for them since the beginning, our missionaries strive especially to prepare mass conversions and put off as much as possible the conversion of individuals when they foresee that the converts could not continue to live in their own country without danger to their life or their faith.

I would simply add that these fears diminish from year to year and that our new Christians or catechumens are beginning to raise their heads proudly when they hear themselves called mtoumé, convert, by some more fanatic native. During this

current year, the baptisms of children have been quite numerous. The superior of the mission at Taguemount-Azouz tells me that he has counted up to 7 in his own mission station. «Thanks to the zeal of our good Sisters », the superior of the station at Beni-Ismail writes to me, « we have had the consolation of celebrating more than fifty baptisms this year. » In the other stations, the number of baptisms has been higher than in previous years.

2) Schools – These have more and more native children in attendance. This year, the average number of these children attending in each mission station has been more than 80. In two of our stations in Kabylia we have had to contend with some rivalry from official schools, since the government made the most of a brief period when these two stations, which had previously belonged to the Jesuit Fathers and which we took them over from them, were closed. The government built schools there at great expense which they can only maintain through more costly expenses and which have no free places for native children.

Recognising the success our missionaries have, the government has not yet dared to build rival schools in the centres which we have always occupied; but we have had to give our schools some kind of legality. The missionaries have had to pass their teachers' certificate in Algiers and have had to have their premises approved. This has incurred further expense, since several of them were found to be inadequate by the official authorities, who thought by doing so they might hamper the missionaries' work.

